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ABSTRACT

The report details the fourth year (October 1996-September 30, 1997) of a Trinity College (Ireland) program to offer second language learning modules to students who are not language majors. The modules' objectives are to develop students' communication skills for study, travel, or work abroad during undergraduate years, and to enhance their academic qualifications, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility. Students can take the language modules for 1 or 2 years; each year of study is complete in itself. Courses in French, German, and Italian are designed for students in specific non-language curriculum areas (the arts, engineering, science, and health sciences). The report outlines the courses offered in 1996-97 and their recruitment, participation, and completion rates, and describes the modules' design and content. It also describes the design and results of testing, and presents brief reports of external evaluations of the French and German modules. A final section describes activities of research and development activities on the project in 1996-97, which included provision of new services to students and experimentation with new technology and techniques for language learning. (MSE)

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ED 415 683

University of Dublin ◆ Trinity College

Report on the fourth year of the ESF-funded project to consolidate and develop foreign language modules for students of other disciplines and the second year of the Language Modules Research and Development Project

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Centre for Language and Communication Studies

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1 October 1996–30 September 1997

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David Little, Director, CLCS

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Ema Ushioda, Research Fellow

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1 Introduction

David Little

1.1 Objectives, organization and funding

1996–7 was the fourth year in which the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) offered French, German and Italian modules to students who were not studying a foreign language as part of their degree course.

The objectives of the modules are: (i) to develop students' communication skills for purposes of study, travel or work experience abroad during their undergraduate years; and (ii) to enhance their academic qualifications, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility. Students can take language modules for one or two years; each year of study is complete in itself. Although students in Science and Arts (Letters) who successfully complete their language module have bonus marks added to their annual examination result, the modules are offered to students on an extracurricular basis.

The language modules were introduced in 1993–4 thanks to a special grant of £100,000 from the Higher Education Authority, which wished to give the learning of foreign languages a more central role in the undergraduate curriculum. The HEA again made special grants available to fund the modules in 1994–5 (£58,000), 1995–6 (£52,000), and 1996–7 (£56,000). In all three years, however, the grants were confirmed only several months after CLCS had committed itself to providing the modules.

In 1994–5 CLCS created a partial buffer against this uncertainty by securing funding to support a three-year Language Modules Research and Development Project, launched in Michaelmas term 1995. The biggest single contribution to this project was a private gift of £105,000 (£36,000 in 1996–7). In addition CLCS was able to raise £27,461 in grants, sponsorship and consultancy earnings in 1996–7. (A summary of income and expenditure is given in the appendix on p.19 of this report.)

1.2 The language modules in 1996–7

A full account of the language modules in 1996–7, including external examiners' reports, is provided in section 2 of this report. Here it is enough to draw attention to the year's chief developments, summarize rates of participation/completion, and note the generally high level of proficiency achieved by students in the end-of-year assessment.

Principal developments in 1996–7 were:

- the suspension of Saturday morning modules and the scheduling of all contact sessions on weekday evenings;
- the restructuring of the course programme into a series of project cycles (see 2.3 below);
- the production of an information booklet for students giving full details of the course programme and working methods;
- the provision of teacher support for self-access study at designated hours outside the weekly two-hour contact session;
- the piloting of a self-access module for students taking Italian for beginners, Year 2 (see 2.3 below);
- the provision of easy student access to Internet resources for language learning through the development of classified listings of Web resources in French, German and Italian.

At the beginning of Michaelmas term 1996, 255 students enrolled for Year 1 modules, compared with 280 in 1995. 104 of these students completed their module (39% of the final total recruitment compared with 28% in 1995).

At the beginning of Michaelmas term 1996, 66 students enrolled for Year 2 modules, compared with 53 in 1995–6. Of these, 51 completed their module, compared with 29 in 1995–6 (70% of the final total recruitment compared with 53%).

In the end-of-year assessment, the average

mark in all but one of the modules was in the II.1 range. This high level of achievement is confirmed by the external examiners' reports (see 2.6 below). Previous modules reports have speculated that there may be a tendency for less proficient students to drop out of their language module before the end of the year, which would increase the average level of performance in the end-of-year assessment. In 1996–7 we collected data that supports this view (see 2.5 below).

1.3 Research and development in 1996–7

Section 3 gives a full account of research-and-development activity in 1996–7. The principal practical achievements were:

- significant further improvement in the organization of self-access learning facilities;
- the introduction of an advisory service for modules students;
- the completion of the computerized catalogue of language learning resources;
- the launch of a project in tandem learning via e-mail in collaboration with the Ruhr-Universität Bochum;
- substantial further progress in the development of (i) multimedia learning resources and (ii) virtual environments for use in language learning via the Internet.

The research team (David Little, Ema Ushioda, Barbara Simpson, Breffni O'Rourke, and Klaus Schwienhorst) were responsible for 12 project-related publications and 14 conference papers and workshops, many of which will yield publications in due course.

1.4 Refurbishment of language learning facilities

In Trinity term 1997 funds were made available to refurbish and extend CLCS's computer network, which now comprises 21 Pentium (or equivalent) multimedia PCs. Of these, 11 are installed in room 4073 of the Arts Building and are used partly for class teaching, while 10 are installed in room 4074 and are reserved for self-access use. Room 4074 also accommodates 15 individual video playback/satellite television viewing facilities and a 15-booth language laboratory. These installations are likewise reserved for self-access use.

It should be noted that these facilities cannot be expanded any further in the accommodation at present allocated to CLCS. With increased demand for computer-based class teaching and further expansion in the language modules scheme in 1997–8, the facilities will come under increasing pressure. In the very near future the College may be faced with the choice of either providing additional space or cutting back on the language modules scheme.

1.5 1996–7 and beyond

As noted in 1.1 above, the HEA first provided funding for the language modules because it wished to see foreign language learning assume a more central role in the undergraduate curriculum. Consequently, the question of how exactly the modules should be integrated with the rest of the curriculum has been with us from the beginning. As also noted in 1.1 above, the language modules have always been offered to students as an extracurricular option.

In Michaelmas term 1996 the University Council again asked the Deans' Committee to look into the question of integrating the modules into the curriculum. In Trinity term 1997 the Senior Lecturer reported that none of the faculties was prepared to integrate the language modules fully into their freshman curriculum. The University Council referred the matter to the Academic Affairs Committee, but it seems unlikely that the extracurricular status of the modules for students of Arts, Science and Engineering will be changed in the near future.

However, two-year French and German modules are fully integrated components of the BA course in Information and Communications Technology that the College is launching in Michaelmas term 1997. It must be hoped that this precedent will be followed in the design of new primary degree programmes in the future.

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Problems of integration notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that in the four years since their introduction the language modules have established themselves as an important part of College life. During this time 1,277 students have enrolled for a language module, and 483 (38%) have been successful in their end-of-year assessment. The annual enrolment for the extracurricular modules has settled at around 350. To this must be added the 80 junior freshmen (and in due course 80 senior freshmen) taking the BA in Information and Communications Technology. As a stand-alone activity, therefore, the language modules scheme has now grown to quasi-departmental proportions.

It is misleading, however, to see the language modules in isolation from the other language teaching and learning that goes on in College. The modern language departments have benefited from the improvements in CLCS's language learning facilities and resources brought about by the Language Modules Research and Development Project. Their students are able to use the guide to self-access language learning that has been compiled in the first instance for the benefit of students taking the language modules; and in 1997–8 members of the language modules research team will be collaborating with colleagues in some modern language departments in the provision of self-access language learning resources and activities tailored to the needs of students in those departments.

To date the language modules have been funded on a year-to-year basis. Since 1995–6 the fragility of this arrangement has been somewhat concealed by the existence of the Language Modules Research and Development Project. However, funding for this project – at least in its present form – will expire in September 1998. It is thus essential to review future arrangements for the language modules early in the academic year 1997–8.

Thanks in large part to the research-and-development framework within which it has evolved, the language modules scheme has attracted a great deal of interest in universities at home and abroad, not least through the publications of the research team. Beyond September 1998 CLCS will continue to seek research funds that will enable it to maintain the language modules scheme at the leading edge of development in foreign language teaching/learning. At the same time, however, it will expect the College to make a long-term financial commitment to the modules. Detailed proposals to this end will be brought forward in the course of Michaelmas term 1997.

2 Language modules in 1996–7

Ema Ushioda

2.1 Modules offered

The modules offered in 1996–7 were as follows:

Monday evening
- German for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 1
- German for beginners in Engineering, Year 1
- Italian for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 1
- German for beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2

Tuesday evening
- French for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Engineering, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Health Sciences, Year 2
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2

Wednesday evening
- French for non-beginners in Science, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Health Sciences, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Science, Year 1

Thursday evening
- Italian for beginners in Arts, Year 2 (self-access module)

2.2 Recruitment and rates of participation

The recruitment of students followed the same procedure as in 1995–6. Publicity information and application forms were included in the mailing sent to incoming junior freshmen by the Admissions Office, while separate mailings were made to rising senior freshmen in Engineering and to students who had completed Year 1 modules in 1995–6. For the first time rising senior freshmen in Computer Science were included in the mailing to students in the Faculty of Engineering, although no students from this department completed a language module in 1996–7.

Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 summarize the rates of participation during the 22 weeks of the modules (expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled for each module).

As in previous years, levels of participation showed a steady decline through Michaelmas term. However, the decline was not as steep as in 1995–6, and overall rates of completion were markedly higher: 39% of Year 1 students completed the modules, compared with only 28% in 1995–6; 70% of Year 2 students completed the modules, compared with only 53% in 1995–6. Furthermore, although total enrolment figures were slightly down on the previous year (343 students, compared with 361 students in 1995–6), the number completing the modules was substantially greater (155 students, compared with 114 students in 1995–6).

One factor which may partly explain the lower rates of attrition in 1996–7 was the suspension of Saturday morning classes in favour of the more popular weekday evening sessions. However, an additional and perhaps more significant factor was undoubtedly the restructuring of the course programme itself as a series of project cycles (see Section 2.3 below), which must be regarded as a very successful development in the evolution of the language modules.

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Module	Initial confirmed enrolment	Number attending first session	Final total recruitment	Number completing module
Year 1 modules				
German beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	17 Arts 16 Science	31 (94%)	37	12 (32%)
German beginners in Engineering (Monday)	17 Eng.	15 (88%)	19	5 (26%)
Italian beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	10 Arts 10 Science	18 (90%)	20	6 (30%)
French non-beginners in Arts (Tuesday)	33 Arts	33 (100%)	33	12 (36%)
German non-beginners in Engineering (Tuesday)	26 Eng.	26 (100%)	29	15 (52%)
French non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	33 Science	33 (100%)	33	15 (45%)
French non-beginners in Health Sciences (Wednesday)	30 Health Sc.	29 (97%)	34	7 (21%)
German non-beginners in Arts (Wednesday)	26 Arts	26 (100%)	26	12 (46%)
German non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	37 Science	36 (97%)	39	20 (51%)
Year 1 total	**255 students**	**247 (97%)**	**270**	**104 (39%)**
Year 2 modules				
German beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Monday)	4 Arts 3 Science 3 Eng.	9 (90%)	12	9 (75%)
French non-beginners in Arts, Science & Health Sc. (Tuesday)	15 Arts 12 Science 5 Health Sc.	29 (91%)	34	21 (62%)
German non-beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Tuesday)	6 Arts 7 Science 7 Eng.	17 (85%)	23	18 (78%)
Italian beginners in Arts self-access module (Thursday)	4 Arts	4 (100%)	4	3 (75%)
Year 2 total	**66 students**	**59 (89%)**	**73**	**51 (70%)**
Total	**321 students**	**306 (95%)**	**343**	**155 (45%)**

Table 2.1
Rates of participation

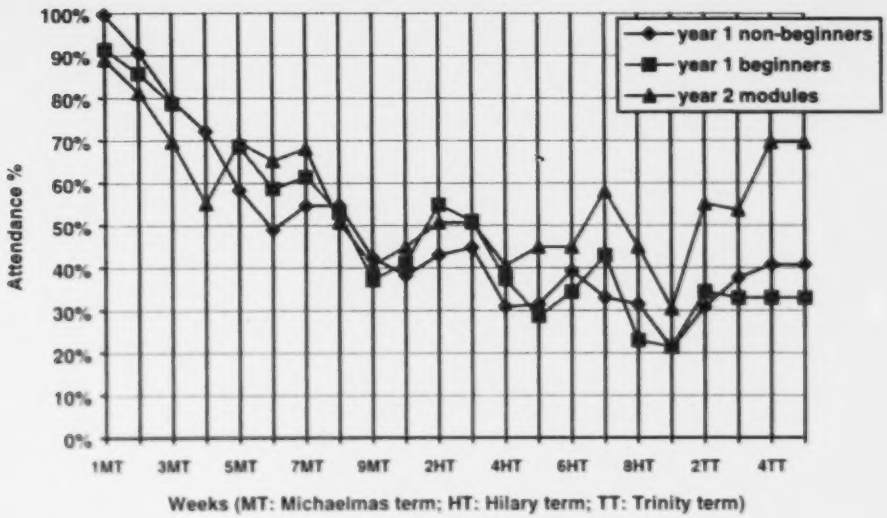

Figure 2.1
Total student participation

2.3 Design of the modules

The reshaping of the modules in 1996–7 was prompted by a concern to create a much tighter course structure that would encourage higher levels of student commitment and regular weekly participation. Hitherto, the non-beginner programme had been organized according to weekly topics and themes, which encouraged some students to skip sessions that seemed less interesting. It was felt that a cycle of learning stretching across a number of weeks was more likely to ensure regular commitment.

The non-beginner programme was thus restructured as a series of four project cycles, the last of which provided the focus for the communicative component of the end-of-year assessment. Each cycle involved students in the preparation of group projects over a three- or four-week period and culminated in a class presentation. Each project cycle was defined by a common theme or framework to give coherence to the work of the class as a whole. In 1996–7, the project cycles were as follows: designing an evening's viewing of television; holding group debates on selected issues; making a poster presentation capturing contemporary life for future generations; producing a class newspaper.

The programme for beginners was similarly redesigned to follow the same project cycle rhythm, though allowing for a longer lead-in period of basic skill foundation and development through Michaelmas term. Group project work for beginners entailed putting communication skills into practice through the preparation of interactive situational role-plays for presentation in the final week of each cycle.

From a pedagogical perspective, the project cycle structure has a number of advantages. It gives students a concrete target to work towards, while allowing them considerable freedom of choice and enabling groups to focus on topics of personal interest or relevant to their academic discipline. Because it requires students to collaborate with one another, plan their learning and work out how they will achieve their target, the project cycle structure offers an excellent vehicle for encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning and develop the independent learning skills that are a long-term objective of the language modules scheme. Furthermore, project work gives students a clear set of purposes when working with the self-access facilities and resources, and encourages them in particular to research authentic resources in print or on the Internet.

Inevitably, the emphasis on project work puts greater demands on students themselves. Particular care was taken to highlight this

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point in the information booklet sent to all applicants before the beginning of the course, and to explain the collaborative and independent working methods to be used in the modules. In addition, the early weeks of the year were devoted to a series of general and practical induction sessions to familiarize students with these working methods.

As already noted, attendance statistics in 1996–7 encourage confidence in the success of the project cycle structure in inducing higher levels of student commitment. Feedback from students taking the Year 2 modules in 1996–7 strongly suggests that the innovation was perceived as a definite improvement in the design of the course, a view reflected in the gratifyingly high percentage (70%) of students who completed these modules.

Project work was also used as the organizing principle for an experimental self-access module for a small group of students who had completed the first year of the Italian for beginners module in 1995–6 and were keen to pursue their language learning further. All the members of the group were from the History of Art Department, and this common academic interest provided the focus for two major projects during the year, each culminating in a slide-show presentation of various works of art with commentary and discussion in Italian. Although teacher support was provided on Thursday evenings, as well as the support of an Italian-speaking student from the History of Art Department, the students themselves were entirely responsible for organizing their own learning, researching materials and developing the linguistic skills and vocabulary needed to accomplish their projects. The success of the scheme was clearly evident in the highly impressive quality of the project presentations in terms of both language and content.

2.4 Design of assessment procedures

As in previous years, two types of assessment were administered in the final two weeks of the modules in Trinity lecture term: (i) a pencil-and-paper test comprising a 100-word dictation and a battery of 4 C-tests, designed to measure students' general underlying control of the target language system; and (ii) a communicative test to assess their ability to deploy their language skills interactively. In 1996–7, the communicative test for non-beginner students comprised the oral and written elements of their final project presentation (producing a class newspaper), while the communicative test for beginners comprised their final oral group presentation. For students taking the Italian Year 2 self-access module, the communicative test was based on the second of their two projects.

In addition, students were informed that their grades in the earlier project cycles would be recorded and might be used to raise borderline grades in the final assessment. Assessing the earlier projects also gave newly recruited teachers valuable experience in working with the rating-scales developed by CLCS (a detailed account of the design and development of these rating-scales may be found in the reports on the first and second years of the language modules, 1993–4 and 1994–5).

Analysis of inter-rater reliability in the Trinity term presentations indicated a high level of agreement among assessors working independently. Teams of three independent assessors were deployed in the French for non-beginners and German for beginners modules. Analysis of their judgements yielded inter-rater reliability coefficients ranging from 0.91 to 0.94. Correlations were calculated between the judgements of assessors working in pairs in the German for non-beginners modules, yielding a range from 0.81 to 0.89. These results justified continuing confidence in the reliability of the assessment instrument and in the user-friendly design of the rating-scales. However, discussion with teachers in 1996–7 suggested possible modifications in the rating categories in the oral assessment instrument. This will be an area for empirical exploration and development in 1997–8.

The C-test batteries used in the non-beginner modules were those which had been piloted and empirically validated the previous year (further details may be found in the 1995–6 report). The batteries were administered to students in the first week of the modules to provide a baseline measure of initial language proficiency, and administered as part of the assessment process at the end of the modules. Among students who took the C-test battery twice, an appreciable measure of progress was observable in the increase in average scores at the end of the year: for students of French, the

average score rose from 66% in Michaelmas term to 71% in Trinity term; for students of German, the average score rose from 55% to 60%.

2.5 Assessment results

155 students completed the assessment process, 104 students in the Year 1 modules, and 51 students in the Year 2 modules. The results are summarized in Table 2.2 below, which shows the range of student performance classified by module and by Faculty. Figure 2.2 allows a comparison between Year 1 and Year 2 modules.

72% of Year 1 students achieved a II.1 grade, while 22% achieved a II.2 grade. 64% of Year 2 students achieved a II.1 grade, while 16% achieved a II.2 grade. 5% of Year 1 students and 16% of Year 2 students achieved a I grade.

Once again the relatively high proportion of upper grades achieved suggests that patterns of attrition/completion in the modules may reflect a process of self-selection, whereby it is the more successful and proficient students who tend to complete the modules. Statistical evidence to support this speculation was obtained in the case of students taking French for non-beginners. Comparing students who

Module	Student nos.	Average mark	Highest mark	Lowest mark
Year 1 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	12	62%	75%	48%
French for non-beginners in Science	15	61%	67%	56%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc.	7	63%	67%	55%
German for non-beginners in Arts	12	64%	70%	57%
German for non-beginners in Science	20	62%	66%	58%
German for non-beginners in Engineering	15	65%	86%	55%
German for beginners in Arts	3	63%	67%	58%
German for beginners in Science	9	62%	67%	57%
German for beginners in Engineering	5	65%	66%	63%
Italian for beginners in Arts	4	64%	69%	57%
Italian for beginners in Science	2	–	69%	57%
Year 2 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	14	64%	70%	52%
French for non-beginners in Science	5	65%	82%	58%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc.	2		61%	55%
German for non-beginners in Arts	5	67%	71%	62%
German for non-beginners in Science	5	61%	68%	55%
German for non-beginners in Engineering	8	57%	69%	49%
German for beginners in Arts	5	65%	70%	60%
German for beginners in Science	3	62%	64%	61%
German for beginners in Engineering	1	–	60%	–
Italian for beginners in Arts	3	74%	78%	69%

Table 2.2
Assessment results

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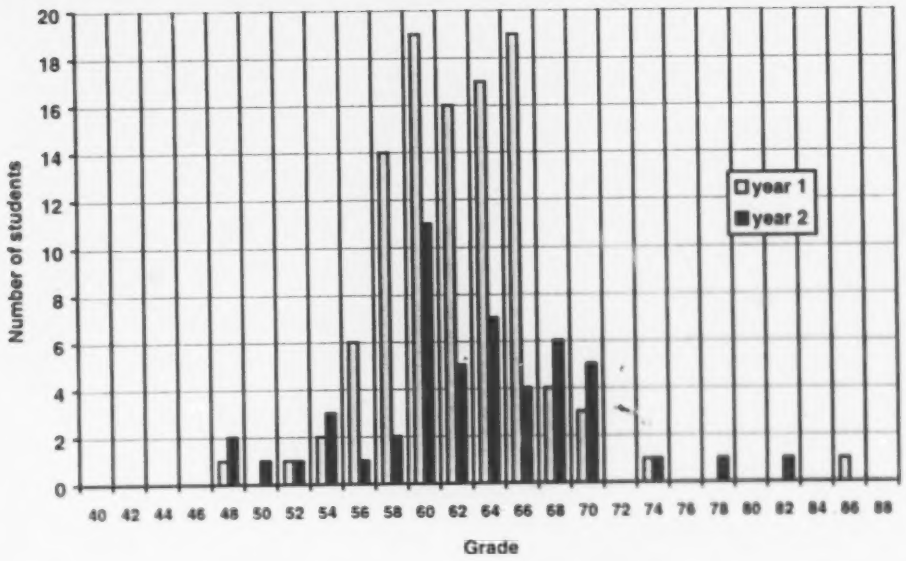

Figure 2.2
Assessment results

completed the French modules with those who did not, an analysis was made of relative performance levels in the C-tests administered in the first week of the modules. The mean C-test score for students who completed the modules was 66%, and 59% for students who later withdrew. A *z*-test was then applied to test the significance of the difference between the two means, and yielded a *z* value of 2.44 (significant at $p \leq 0.01$), thus supporting the notion that students who completed the modules derived from a population with a higher average proficiency level. A similar pattern was reflected in the comparison of mean C-test scores between students who completed the German for non-beginner modules and those who did not (55% and 51% respectively), although a statistically significant result was not obtained.

2.6 Reports of external examiners

French
(Dr Edith Esch, Language Centre, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

General remarks – As always, the examination was well organized and conducted professionally. Standards were high overall and a determined effort to attend to issues raised last year had been made. While fine-tuning in the domain of the specification of the tasks needs attention, the change towards project work in the programme for non-beginners is an improvement and the new information booklet is a model of the genre for which CLCS must be congratulated.

The performance of most students shows that the modules are well-suited to the needs of non-specialists who major in a variety of disciplines but wish to maintain and improve their proficiency in languages for the purpose of communication.

Information received and conduct of the examination – As evaluator of the pilot modules between 1993 and 1995 and external examiner in 1996, I was familiar with the assessment procedures and the use of the rating sheets.

All the information I required was sent to me over two months before the examinations by the project coordinator, whose efficiency and professionalism must be commended. This year, getting the information in good time was particularly valuable because of the important changes which had been made in the overall organization, namely the introduction of a

cycle of several projects to be presented, with the last presentation forming part of the final assessment. Although it was agreed that the main part of the external examiner's responsibility was to attend the oral presentations, a sample of the "newspapers" produced by the groups for the examination was sent to me after the presentations, giving a good idea of the written performance of the students.

Oral presentations attended – Two evenings were devoted to the observation of presentations. On 22 April I was able to see the performance of nine groups of French non-beginners from Year 1 Arts and Year 2 Arts, Science and Health Sciences. On 23 April I observed ten groups from Science and Health Sciences.

Evaluation of the "project work" idea – The organization of the modules according to cycles of group project work throughout the year appears to be an excellent idea for the teaching of non-specialists in higher education. In terms of programme content it makes it possible to cope with students from different intellectual backgrounds and a wide range of language learning abilities and levels of attainment. Group work also has pedagogical advantages as it encourages students to learn cooperatively, which in turn affects their motivation and engagement with the task. Typically, it gives scope for imagination and creativity too. Finally, project work has the longer term advantage of giving a helpful framework to students for the development of working methods – or the assessment of the methods they already use, often unconsciously – for the management of the task.

Assessment of the group performances – Given the new structure of the modules, all the groups were presenting the same "newspaper" project. This made comparison between the groups easier, and the choice of project had the advantage of displaying students' integrated skills.
My overall impression is that individuals' performances were of good quality generally but that some students should have given more careful attention to task specification. Some of the groups produced excellent work. They had thought through the production of a magazine or newspaper not only as a cooperative task but also as a communication exercise. In other words, the end product had been conceived with a particular audience in mind and with the appropriate editorial control. However, there seemed to be too many groups where the individuals within the groups had a very limited and narrow concept of the task at hand. For them, apparently, the fact that they were to produce a newspaper or a magazine did not affect what they wrote or the way they wrote it; they could as well have been given an essay to write. In other words, the communicative framework they had been given was not shaping their use of the language.

This was discussed with the coordinator and the teachers. Their opinion was that students simply did not have enough time together. If they started from a relatively low level, they were unable to progress quickly enough to a level of linguistic control such that they could manage the task at that level.

I would like to suggest that given the explicit aims of the modules, teaching students to communicate messages effectively in spite of their linguistic limitations should take precedence. This would also stress the commitment to the theoretical basis underpinning the pedagogy of these modules, which is clearly stated in the information booklet (p.7). Restricting the range of the task may be worth considering as a solution to the problem. For example, in the case of the newspaper project, all the students in a group might be asked to write on the same topic for a particular (prescribed) newspaper or magazine, the oral presentation being a discussion in the editorial office – with the examiners in the role of editorial team perhaps, where each "journalist" tries to convince the editor that his/her article is the one which will sell best with the target readership.

Pronunciation – I wish to mention pronunciation separately because of the remarks I made about it last year. There was a noticeable improvement in that area and the number of errors apparently induced by the written language was very small, and often the result of an obvious "slip".

Use of the Web and of technology generally – Students had been encouraged to look for information by themselves and in particular to make use of the Web. This is to be thoroughly commended. However, I wish here to note for future reference that the few students who went for a topic because they had found information on the Web and had simply done a cut-and-paste operation without checking any of the information or thinking about what it meant, were doing themselves a disservice.

Perhaps students should be reminded at the outset that nothing replaces proper thinking – particularly when they are attempting to deal with "hot" topics like French food with French examiners! Another small point: it was a pity that students who produced otherwise excellent magazines and newspapers had not made use of spelling checkers when using the word processor. They could have avoided – in particular – many gender errors which inevitably "read" very unfavourably in newspaper titles.

Conclusion – A huge improvement on the points mentioned last year and very successful changes in the overall design. One would like to think that improvements in the design of the communicative tasks can be achieved easily if the teachers' initial training is improved and more closely monitored.

German

(Prof. Dr. L. Legenhausen, University of Münster, Germany)

Introductory remarks – As in 1995–6, the external examiner was given all necessary assistance and information to get an excellent impression and overview of course contents, testing procedures and achievement levels. In addition to the information given in various briefings, the following assessment is mainly based on

- detailed information on course content and assessment procedures received before the oral presentations;
- attendance at oral presentations on 28 and 29 April, 1997;
- a large selection of pencil-and-paper tests (Year 1 and Year 2 beginners and non-beginners) and copies of the newspaper articles presented by students on 29April.

The integrative testing formats used in written and oral modes ensure a comprehensive and valid coverage of communicative skills without ignoring aspects of accuracy. The fact that the oral presentations grow out of course projects and thus form an integral part of the language module must be seen as a major asset of the overall scheme, since it ensures the content validity of testing procedures and also provides an additional incentive for purposeful interactions during course work.

Presentations and proficiency levels – The beginners' presentations generally showed a well-balanced interaction between skilled script rehearsal and impromptu speech which allowed for topical references to political scandals revealed only the previous day (cf. the presentation "TV interview"). In some cases the students' enthusiasm and dedication had resulted in elaborate scripts (cf., for example, the presentation "One Wedding and a Funeral"), the reliance on which, however, allowed less room for improvisation. A noteworthy feature of the beginners' presentation was the excellent standard of pronunciation achieved by many students. In this respect the beginners' performances did not differ from non-beginners'. The question-and-answer phase following the presentations clearly demonstrated that the beginners could react meaningfully to the assessors' questions, and some had acquired more than basic survival skills.

The project presentations of non-beginners were based on their contributions to a class newspaper. The articles were commented on individually and they generally reflected the students' personal interests (e.g., sports/ pirate radio stations etc.) and/or were related to their main academic subject (e.g., technical and environmental topics). In both cases the quality of the articles and the style of oral presentation profited from a research approach to the subject matter. These individual presentations, furthermore, facilitated the assessment of the language performance, especially since no role-play enthusiasm and no undue concern with props could interfere. It might be worth exploring whether students could also be motivated to apply their research approach to linguistic aspects of the target language. The language standard was generally high, with pronunciation varying more than other aspects. In particular the vocabulary deployed was differentiated and appropriate.

Another striking feature of the assessment sessions was the relaxed atmosphere in which the presentations of all group projects took place, and, on the other hand, the concentrated endeavour and determination to perform well, which might have been partly due to peer-group pressure exerted in group project work. The systematic exploitation of group dynamics also seems to be a characteristic feature of the course modules.

Concluding remarks – The good and often excellent performances of all groups can only be explained in terms of a dedicated learning

endeavour which is fostered by a many-faceted learning environment and a well-structured course module design at CLCS. It is the combined effect of self-access facilities (e-mail tandem programme; Internet surfing; learning software; video viewing etc.) which allows and encourages students to assume responsibility for their own learning, which in turn is a prerequisite for high achievement levels. The working methods implemented and encouraged in the course modules reflect the latest developments in second language acquisition theory and are well-suited to set new standards for foreign language courses at the university level.

3 The Language Modules Research and Development Project in 1996–7

David Little

3.1 Self-access resources

(Barbara Lazenby Simpson)

As a result of the findings of a study carried out in 1996 (see 1995–6 report, p.11), which indicated weaknesses in students' approach to self-access learning, the provision of information about self-directed language learning was developed throughout the year. In addition to a booklet, which provided both an introduction to the self-access language learning facilities and some general guidelines to self-directed language learning, a set of nine leaflets was produced, each of which focused on a different medium or aspect of language learning.

An advisory service was also made available to students, who were invited to contact the relevant research assistant either by making an appointment or by e-mail. Regular contact was maintained with a considerable number of students through the year. Those students experiencing difficulty using computers and accessing the Internet were given individual demonstrations. Other queries relating to language learning and the planning of individual study programmes, were generally dealt with by e-mail, and this arrangement proved satisfactory to all concerned.

New learning materials were acquired, particularly on CD-ROM, and these have greatly enriched the resources available to students. The provision of resources has become even more significant as a result of the decision to base the modules on project cycles. Video film still remains a popular means of accessing the target language on a self-study basis, and new videos have been acquired in French, German and Italian. Only some of these videos are subtitled, which means that there is suitable material on film for learners at all levels. In general, print material is the least popular medium and, as a consequence, subscriptions to some foreign language journals have been cancelled and the same journals are now purchased on CD-ROM.

The computer database has been further developed, with the inclusion of detailed information on all computer software. This is in addition to a catalogue of CD-ROMs. Every entry has also been categorized under a single heading, such as "vocabulary", "grammar", "culture", etc. This enables users to identify at a glance the principal focus of any item. The database is now available on the CLCS network server and so may be accessed from any point on the CLCS network. The database was presented and discussed in a poster presentation at the EUROCALL conference held at Dublin City University, September 1997.

3.2 Tandem language learning via e-mail

(David Little, Ema Ushioda, Klaus Schwienhorst)

For the past two years CLCS has been a member of the International E-Mail Tandem Network, coordinated by the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. As part of the network's two-year EU-funded project "Telematics for Autonomous and Intercultural Tandem Learning" (1996–8), CLCS is undertaking an empirical evaluation of tandem language learning via e-mail and MOOs (multi-user domains, object-oriented).

Within this sub-project TCD students taking CLCS's German modules are paired with Bochum students taking a course in English for International Communication. The two courses

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share a number of features, including an emphasis on the development and use of communication skills, a focus on similar topic areas, and cycles of project work. In both institutions, moreover, the courses are taken as extracurricular options by students who are not studying a foreign language for their degree. The collaboration between Dublin and Bochum thus yields an appropriately controlled context within which to conduct an empirical evaluation of tandem language learning via e-mail and MOOs.

In 1996–7, a pilot project was undertaken in order to

- develop robust organizational structures through discussions with our partner institution;
- evaluate students' initial perceptions of tandem language learning via e-mail;
- explore a small corpus of German and English linguistic data produced by tandem partners.

The outcomes of the pilot project will provide the basis for a full-scale empirical investigation of tandem language learning via e-mail and MOOs in 1997–8. (Copies of a more detailed report on the 1996–7 pilot project may be obtained by writing to Ema Ushioda at CLCS, Arts Building, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland; e-mail: eushioda@tcd.ie.)

3.3 Interactive multimedia and emerging network technologies

(Breffni O'Rourke)

Research and development continued this year in the areas of interactive video, multimedia and network technologies for language learning. September 1996 saw the demonstration, at the Fourth CERCLES International Conference in Dresden, of a pilot interactive video module developed using the Authorware multimedia environment. The development and further refinement of this module highlighted a number of issues, both theoretical and practical, that have continued to inform work in this area. The pilot module combines a number of design approaches that share the aim of facilitating the development and exercise of learner autonomy through communicative group activity, while sustaining a focus, at various levels, on formal aspects of the target language. There is a need to optimize the effectiveness of such modules both by selecting those activity types that are most effective with respect to their particular pedagogical focus and by combining those activities in a manner most conducive to autonomous modes of learning.

There are important practical criteria for modules under development, in addition to the more theoretical criteria mentioned above. First, in order make feasible the development of a series of modules for each of two languages, a generic architecture with, as far as practicable, reusable software units, is highly desirable. Such an architecture would effectively constitute a template for further production. An architecture for a language-learning system that builds on the pilot module has now been finalized; work is underway on detail-level design, i.e., selection and design of tasks that will meet the criterion of reusability. Second, it will be necessary to identify a source of authentic materials, not only video but also text and, perhaps, audio, that will form the basis of further template-based modules.

While work in these areas continues, the promising avenues opened up by emerging network technologies are also being explored. Since the chosen platform for multimedia development to this point has been Authorware, Macromedia's complementary Shockwave technology, which allows Authorware pieces to be adapted for delivery over a network, provides one obvious possibility for enhancing the existing approach to multimedia authoring. A further key network technology is the Java programming language, which allows quite complex programs resident on a server to be run on client machines. These two technologies, Shockwave and Java, offer a variety of new possibilities. On the practical level, it would simplify installation and program maintenance to provide a single copy of the programs from CLCS's server, which would then be easily accessible from each of the multimedia computers available for self-access learning. With regard to pedagogy, this configuration allows the integration of centralized systems for asynchronous learner collaboration. Opportunities for such collaboration are provided not only by the language modules' internal project framework, but also by the Dublin-Bochum tandem sub-project (see 3.2 above).

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As part of the process of attaining expertise in Java, a pilot project is underway at present that may be online, in an early form, for the beginning of the academic year 1997-98. The project involves the creation of a Java-based vocabulary learning tool that facilitates the collection, classification and testing of words and expressions collected by individual students.

1997–8 should see the completion of one or more modules based on the generic, task-oriented architecture alluded to above, as well as the further exploration of complementary and integrated network technologies. These developments formed the basis of a show-and-tell session at the EUROCALL conference hosted by Dublin City University in September 1997.

3.4 Virtual environments and synchronous communication in self-access

(Klaus Schwienhorst)

The line of research begun in 1995–6 was developed further in 1996–7. MOO technology has further been exploited as a reliable, flexible and adaptable means of integrating communication and information resources over the Internet, and thus as an ideal tool for collaborative work between language learners. The smooth transition from a purely text-based interface towards a hypertext and multimedia graphical user interface has further enhanced the importance of MOOs for language learners and educators.

The virtual reality at Diversity University has been further developed by installing resources in German, English, French, and Italian. The emergence of new Internet technology like Java, JavaScript, and improved video and audio transmission has made it possible to include an ever increasing amount of interactive and multimedia resources from all over the world. Search engines that are now available in various languages and for different countries greatly facilitate the search for authentic material. All these technologies were used to create tasks that are connected to the modules content and can be worked on by students in self-access.

The tasks do not prescribe an actual activity from start to finish, but rather provide students with a template that they can adapt to their preferred style and pace of learning, their preferred topics of study, etc. Tasks can be used side by side with authentic material, and each can be selected separately. Each task consists of a number of sub-tasks that can be worked on in 15-30 minutes, using Internet resources (preferably working with a tandem partner, but also alone), e-mail, and the MOO facilities. As it is fairly simple for students to obtain and organize copies of their e-mail exchanges and transcripts of live conversations in the MOO virtual environment, the results of their collaborations play a major role in the scheme of tasks. Students are able to see how they performed in an actual live performance with a native speaker, see where major disruptions in communication occurred, how their own conversation strategies worked, how the native speaker performed in comparison, etc. The e-mails and transcripts of MOO sessions provide the students with examples of their own performance and authentic target language input relevant to their particular needs. This helps to raise language awareness and encourages students to analyse and assess their own proficiency to plan further short- and long-term goals in language learning.

The benefits of Internet-based multi-user virtual reality, in particular the MOO, were presented at a MOO-workshop at the December 1996 Tandem Conference in Bochum and the September 1997 EUROCALL conference.

3.5 Publications

Little, D., 1996: "Learner autonomy – first language/second language: some reflections on the nature and role of metalinguistic knowledge", *Education (Malta)* 5.4, pp.3–6.

Little, D., 1996: "Learner autonomy in theory and practice", *Actes APAC ELT Convention '96, APAC of News* 28 (October 1996), 46–51.

Little, D., 1997: "Responding authentically to authentic texts: a problem for self-access learning?". In P. Benson and P. Voller (eds), *Autonomy and Independence in Language*

Learning, pp.225–36. London and New York: Longman.

Little, D., 1997: "Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: theoretical foundations and some essentials of pedagogical practice", *Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung* 8.2, pp.227–44.

Little, D., 1997: "Autonomy and self-access in second language learning: some fundamental issues in theory and practice". In M. Müller-Verweyen (ed.), *Neues Lernen – Selbstgesteuert – Autonom/New Developments in Foreign Language Learning – Self-Management – Autonomy*, pp.33–44. Munich: Goethe-Institut.

Little, D., 1997: "Lernziel: kontrastive Sprachbewußtheit – Lernerautonomie aus konstruktivistischer Sicht", *Fremdsprachen und Hochschule* 50, pp.37-49.

O'Rourke, B., 1997: "Report on the design of a self-access multimedia tool for language learning". In D. Little and B. Voss (eds), *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millennium*, Papers from the 4th CERCLES Conference, pp.163–78. Plymouth: CERCLES.

Schwienhorst, K., 1997a: " Virtual environments and synchronous communication – collaborative language learning in object-oriented multiple-user domains". In D. Little and B. Voss (eds), *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millennium*, Papers from the 4th CERCLES Conference, pp.126–45. Plymouth: CERCLES.

Schwienhorst, K., 1997b: " Modes of interactivity – Internet resources for second language learning". In D. Kranz, L. Legenhausen and B. Lüking (eds), *Multimedia–Internet–Lernsoftware: Fremdsprachenunterricht vor neuen Herausforderungen*, pp.105–10. Münster: agenda Verlag.

Simpsen, B. L., 1997: "Social distance as a factor in the achievement of pragmatic competence". CLCS Occasional Paper No. 47. Dublin: Trinity College, Centre for Language and Communication Studies.

Simpson, B. L., 1997: "An examination of learners' preferences in self-access study and their perceived benefits for learning". In D. Little and B. Voss (eds), *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millennium*, Papers from the 4th CERCLES Conference, pp.82–96. Plymouth: CERCLES.

Ushioda, E., 1997: "The role of motivational thinking in autonomous language learning". In D. Little and B. Voss (eds), *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millennium*, Papers from the 4th CERCLES Conference, pp.38–50. Plymouth: CERCLES.

3.6 Conference papers and workshops

Little, D.: "The role of writing in second language learning: some neo-Vygotskian reflections". Paper presented at the colloquium *Prozesse des Schreibens*, University of Hannover, 24–25 January 1997.

Little, D.: "Strategies in language learning and teaching: some introductory reflections". Keynote paper presented at CILT Research Forum on Strategies in Foreign Language Learning, London, 22 February 1997.

Little, D.: "Lernziel: kontrastive Sprachbewußtheit (Lernerautonomie aus konstruktivistischer Sicht)". Invited paper presented at 7. Göttinger Fachtagung – Fremdsprachenausbildung an der Universität, Göttingen, 6–8 March 1997.

Little, D.: "Open and distance language learning: practical problems, possible solutions, research questions". Keynote talk given at CILT Research Symposium on Open and Distance Language Learning, Leeds, 14 June 1997.

Little, D.: "Learner autonomy and the challenge of tandem language learning via the Internet". Invited talk given at the inaugural conference of the European Language Council, Lille, 3–5 July 1997.

Little, D.: "Strategies, counselling and cultural difference: why we need an anthropological understanding of learner autonomy". Keynote paper presented at the 6th Conference on Developing Autonomous Learning, Barcelona, 4–7 September 1997.

Little, D., & E. Ushioda: "Designing, implementing and evaluating a project in tandem language learning via e-mail". Paper presented at EUROCALL '97, Dublin, 11–13 September 1997.

O'Rourke, B.: "Interactive multimedia and authentic video: a self-access program for group work". Show-and-tell session presented at EUROCALL '97, Dublin, 11–13 September 1997.

Schwienhorst, K.: MOO-workshop at the Tandem Conference "Telematics for Autonomous and Intercultural Tandem Learning", Bochum, 16-18 December 1996.

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Schwienhorst, K., "The 'third place' – virtual reality applications for second language learning". Paper presented at EUROCALL '97, Dublin, 11-13 September 1997.

Simpson, B. L.: "An examination of data elicitation methods in research into L2 pragmatics, and their influence on the determination of pragmatic competence in non-native speakers". Paper presented at GALA'97, Edinburgh, 4–6 April 1997.

Simpson, B. L., "The rationale for, and design of, a pedagogical database for self-access learners". Poster presented at EUROCALL '97, Dublin, 11–13 September 1997.

Ushioda, E.: "Motivation and learner independence". Colloquium on motivation convened with P. Skehan at the Learner Independence PCI Symposium, Brighton, 1 April 1997.

Ushioda, E.: "The affective dimension of learner autonomy: the role of reflection". Workshop given with N. Aoki at the 6th Conference on Developing Autonomous Learning, Barcelona, 4–7 September 1997.

Appendix: summary of income and expenditure

	LANGUAGE MODULES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT			LANGUAGE MODULES RECURRENT COSTS		
Income	Brought forward from 1995–6	£21,958		Brought forward from 1995–6	£33,437	
	Benefaction	£36,000		HEA special allocation	£56,000	
	Grants, sponsorship and consultancy earnings	£27,461				
	Total		**£85,419**	**Total**		**£89,437**
Expenditure	Salaries and studentships	£32,683		Salaries and hourly-paid teaching	£43,198	
	Conferences and travel	£7,536		External examiners' fees and expenses	£1,538	
	Equipment	£5,300		Entertainment	£998	
	Stationery and printing	£1,889		Printing	£350	
	Miscellaneous	£1,137				
	TCD overheads	£1,238				
	Total		**£49,783**	**Total**		**£46,084**
	Balance carried forward to 1997–8		**£35,636**	**Balance carried forward to 1997–8**		**£43,353**